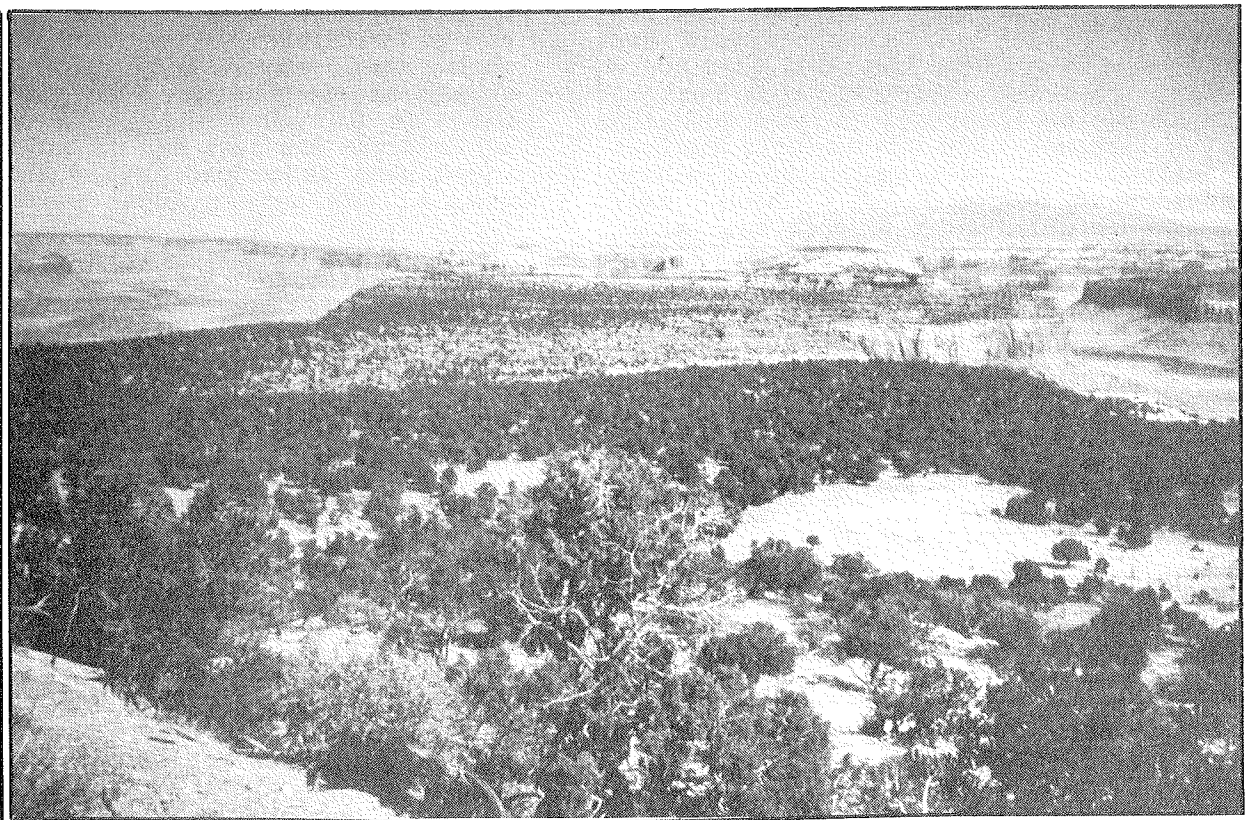


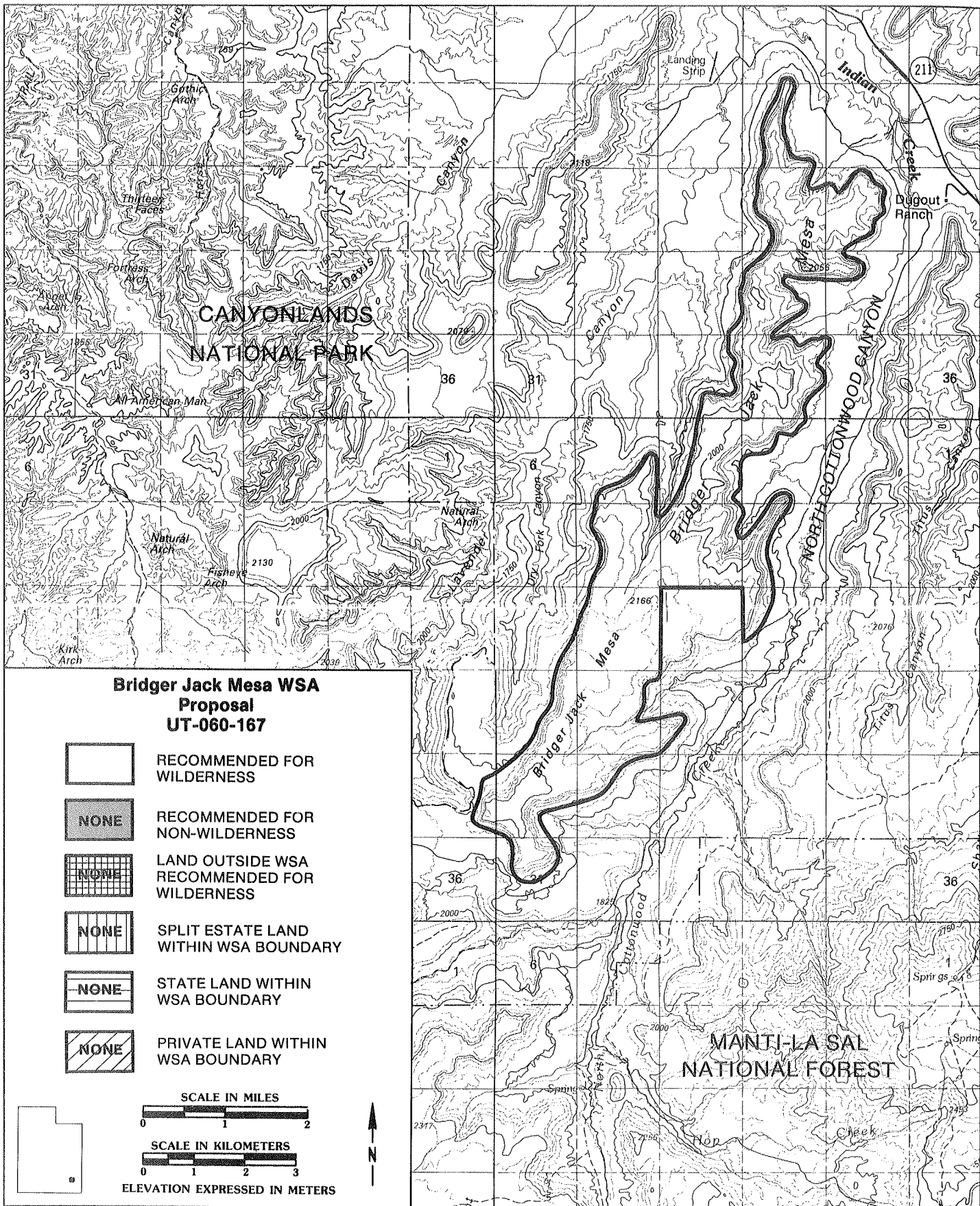
Bridger Jack Mesa WSA



BRIDGER JACK MESA WSA

R. 20 E.

R. 21 E.



T. 31 S.

T. 32 S.

BRIDGER JACK MESA STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 5,290 acres

The Bridger Jack Mesa Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-060-167) is in north-central San Juan County, about 18 miles northwest of Monticello, Utah (population 1,929). The study area is an elongated unit about 10 miles long from north to south and a little more than 2 miles from east to west at the widest point. The boundary is determined by the configuration of Bridger Jack Mesa except for the south-central boundary, which is along the edge of a State section, and on the west and north where the boundary is along roads (see Map). The southwest edge of the WSA is less than a 0.25 mile from Canyonlands National Park (see Map). The WSA contains 5,290 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

There are no private, State or split-estate lands inheld in the WSA (see Table 1).

The WSA is in the Canyonlands section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province. Bridger Jack Mesa is a nearly north-south trending narrow tableland bounded by spectacular orange-red cliffs. The mesa slopes gently northward and elevations in the WSA range from 6,000 to 6,200 feet. The top of the mesa is from about 500 to 1,000 feet higher than the surrounding land. No perennial streams flow in the WSA. Vegetation is predominantly pinyon-juniper woodland, with small, interspersed sagebrush parks. The climate is arid to semiarid, with hot summers and cold winters.

TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

WITHIN THE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	5,290
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0
Total	5,290
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	5,290
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	5,290
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	0
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

BRIDGER JACK MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and a no wilderness (no action) alternative.

Subsequent to publication of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS, the Utah State Director approved the San Juan Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP). The plan includes all of the Bridger Jack Mesa WSA in the Bridger Jack Mesa Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to protect semi-primitive recreation opportunities and to provide an area for comparative studies of the recovery of relict plant communities from the effects of grazing. Special management requirements now in effect within the ACEC, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: closure to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use; stipulations to prevent surface occupancy of the mesa top on oil and gas leases (Category 3); closure to disposal of mineral materials; stipulations to preclude surface use of the mesa top insofar as possible on mining claims; exclusion from private or commercial use of woodland products, except for limited on-site collection of dead wood for campfires; exclusion from livestock grazing, including grazing by saddle stock and pack animals; exclusion from land treatments or other improvements, except for test plots and facilities necessary for study of the near relict plant communities; management to limit recreation use if vegetation resources are being damaged; exclusion from watershed control structures and wildlife habitat improvements; exclusion from surface disturbance by mechanized or motorized equipment, except helicopter access for scientific study and helicopter equipment, insofar as is legally possible.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

5,290 acres

(recommended for wilderness)

0 acres

(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate all of the area (5,290 acres) as wilderness. This is the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term.

All of the WSA is in a natural state and has outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The main special feature of the WSA is the view from the mesa. BLM's analysis indicates that there is some potential for extraction of uranium from the WSA. Following wilderness designation, uranium related activities on valid mining claims existing at the time of designation would have only slight, short-term effects on wilderness values. BLM believes that the wilderness values of the area outweigh any potential losses of uranium production in the area.

Approximately 5,290 acres of the WSA are in the Bridger Jack Mesa ACEC where restrictions on OHV use, mineral and energy production, mineral material disposal, harvest of woodland products, and surface disturbance by mechanized and motorized vehicles would continue to be administratively applied if the area is released from wilderness consideration and protection of wilderness characteristics is not a management objective.

No significant conflicts exist with other resource uses. Livestock use was terminated in 1970, providing an area that is useful for comparative vegetation studies.

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. The WSA meets the naturalness criteria on all 5,290 acres.

The WSA is generally in an unaltered condition. The imprints of human activity are minor. Two trails constructed for livestock have deteriorated from

BRIDGER JACK MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

lack of maintenance. At least three reservoirs were constructed on the mesa. One of the reservoirs was on the State section adjacent to the WSA. The reservoirs have filled in, revegetated, and now blend into the environment. They are not noticeable from the air. A scoop and a plow used in the construction of the reservoirs were left on the mesa. Neither implement is noticeable unless it is searched out.

Mining claims have been staked and annual claim assessment work has been completed in portions of the WSA, but there are no major imprints within the WSA from this activity. No other surface-disturbing activities have occurred since the wilderness inventory.

B. Solitude

At the present time, with only limited visitor use, the entire Bridger Jack Mesa WSA provides outstanding opportunities for solitude.

The narrow elongated configuration of the mesa would tend to concentrate any increased recreational activities. In at least four areas, the mesa is less than a 0.5 mile wide, which limits opportunities for solitude. The rolling terrain and rock outcrops obscure sights and sounds of others in about 50 percent of the WSA. The pinyon-juniper woodland provides added visual screening and would help dissipate, but not eliminate, sights and sounds from other groups.

Outside sights and sounds are apparent. The paved road to Canyonlands National Park is easily seen from a portion of the rim of the mesa, and traffic can be heard from the two northern points of the mesa. The Dugout Ranch hay fields and roads in Lavender and North Cottonwood Canyons are also readily observed from the WSA.

Airplanes are frequently observed over the area. From Bridger Jack Mesa, a visitor has excellent views of the Six-Shooter Peaks, Lavender Mesa, Harts Point, and Canyonlands National Park.

Overall, the mesa top offers opportunities for seclusion, while the narrow necks and off-site intrusions limit

opportunities to find seclusion in the northern half of the WSA.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The entire 5,290 acres in the WSA meet the criterion for outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

At the present time, Bridger Jack Mesa WSA provides opportunities for primitive recreational experiences due to its difficult access and limited visitor use. However, the narrow necks of the mesa would tend to concentrate user activities. The elongated mesa top itself confines all recreation to a narrow band (especially in the northern portion).

D. Special Features

The view from Bridger Jack Mesa is the major asset of the WSA, enhancing the recreational experience. The WSA may contain up to 125 archaeological sites.

Peregrine falcon and the spineless hedgehog cactus, (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus* var. *inermis*), which are listed as endangered, may occur in the WSA. Seven other animal species that are considered sensitive also may occur in the WSA.

Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

BRIDGER JACK MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is entirely juniper-pinyon woodland (5,290 acres).

The PNV in the WSA is represented in the NWPS nationally and in Utah and in other BLM study areas both in and outside of Utah. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any population centers.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Area

The Bridger Jack Mesa WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 44 areas comprising 3,143,330 acres in Utah and Colorado, the adjacent state nearest the WSA.

A Bridger Jack Mesa Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau, however, where there are just two established wilderness areas, totaling 70,751 acres.

There are four designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA.

Approximately 15 miles south of the WSA is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (U.S. Forest Service [FS]), and to the east, in Colorado, are the 16,505-acre Mt. Sneffels (FS), the 41,189-acre Lizard Head Wilderness areas (FS) and the 8,100-acre Mesa Verde Wilderness (National Park Service [NPS]).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The entire WSA could be managed as wilderness to preserve the values now present in the area. The area is not grazed by livestock. There are no oil and gas leases in the WSA and new leases would not be issued. There are 68 mining claims covering about 1,360 acres of the WSA.

Because there is some potential for uranium in the WSA, BLM anticipates that a portion of these and future claims existing at the time of designation will be valid. However, disturbance related to these claims likely will be small (about 5 acres). There are no private, State, or split-estate land in-holdings in the WSA.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) prepared a mineral assessment report for the Bridger Jack Mesa WSA (USGS Bulletin 1754-A, Charles G. Patterson, et al., 1989).

TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,138,715
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,700,908

Source: BLM File Data.

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The report indicates that inferred sub-economic resources of sandstone and sand and gravel exist, but because of their abundance throughout the region, their distance from current markets, and their lack of unique properties, these materials have no current likelihood of development. The potential for undiscovered resources of uranium and byproducts vanadium and copper and all other metals is high in the northeastern portion of the WSA, but is low in the southern part of the WSA. The resource potential for undiscovered oil and gas is moderate. The resource potential for undiscovered placer gold and silver is low. The resource potential for undiscovered potash and halite (rock salt) is low. Rock layers that contain potash or halite elsewhere in the region do not extend beneath the WSA.

Hydrocarbon-bearing formations and structural traps exist at depth, but drilling in adjacent areas has not resulted in any production. The resource potential for undiscovered geothermal energy and coal is also low. No evidence or reports of geothermal energy in the region of the WSA have been found. No coal-bearing formations are present in the WSA.

A rare earth mineral (braitschite) that is present elsewhere in the region in a particular thin rock layer may or may not be present beneath the surface in the WSA. The resource potential for this mineral is unknown.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects on wilderness values which is considered to be the only pertinent resource that would be significantly affected by designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Com-

ments received during the early stages of EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 81 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 253 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs. In general, 56 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 191 commenters were opposed. Six commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the special values in the WSA. The majority of those commenting were from other states. Of particular concern was the need to protect wilderness values.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would preclude mineral-related activity and wood harvest, restrict public access, conflict with other land uses, and harm State and local economies. Almost all of those opposing wilderness designation were from rural Utah.

Three Federal agencies, the USBM, the NPS, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), commented on the Draft EIS for this WSA.

The USBM commented that BLM underrated the petroleum potential of the WSA but the agency did not comment on designation or nondesignation of the WSA.

The NPS supported wilderness designation because of the proximity of the WSA to Canyonlands National Park. NPS stated that Bridger Jack Mesa offers outstanding opportunities for solitude, that it is an exceptional natural area representing pinyon-juniper woodland as documented by Van Pelt (1978), that roads are visible only from the edge of the

BRIDGER JACK MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

mesa, that noise from passing cars does not carry to the top of the mesa, and that it provides magnificent views of Lavender Canyon. NPS also stated that management of wilderness values would be simplified if T. 32 S., R. 21 E., Secs. 7, 18, and 19 and T. 32 S., R. 20 E., Secs. 24 were included in the WSA based upon their outstanding scenic quality and lack of development. NPS commented that the addition of these areas would form a continuous wilderness unit between Bridger Jack Mesa and Canyonlands National Park and help maintain wilderness resources in both areas.

The EPA did not comment on designation or nondesignation of the WSA. EPA recommended several steps to improve on integrated multiple resource management including a suggestion to consider grouping several WSAs (including Bridger Jack Mesa) adjacent to Canyonlands National Park under similar management or as a larger geographical unit.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are no State sections in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State commented that the Bridger Jack Mesa WSA has moderate wilderness values and the lowest degree of conflict in the region and that there are no conflicts of major significance with the recommended 5,290-acre all wilderness alternative, but that a potential conflict exists with future habitat management for wildlife. The State also commented that the potential for uranium deposits under the WSA is greater than described in the Draft EIS.

The Bridger Jack Mesa WSA is in San Juan County. The San Juan County Master Plan emphasizes multiple use of public lands and zones the WSA as open range and forest land. The San Juan County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation for the Bridger Jack Mesa WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS the Commission noted that des-

ignation of the WSA as wilderness would be in conflict with the County Master Plan and that the WSA is geologically and ecologically identical to other areas already protected in the GCNRA, National Parks, National Monuments, and FS wilderness within the Colorado Plateau and in San Juan County.

BRIDGER JACK MESA WSA

Table 3
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative^a

Alternatives		
Issue Topic	Recommendation All Wilderness (5,290 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness
	<p>Wilderness designation would preserve overall wilderness values in the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 5 acres and indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 106 acres due to exploration and development of valid mining claims. Special features would be preserved overall.</p>	<p>Wilderness value would not be protected by wilderness designation. Surface disturbance in the WSA would continue to be limited by closures to OHV use, surface disturbance by mechanized and motorized vehicles, and woodland harvest, as well as restrictions on surface disturbance associated with mineral and energy development. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 17 acres and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be temporarily reduced in quality on up to an additional 529 acres of the WSA as a result of uranium exploration and development. Special features would not be significantly affected. Scenic view areas from the mesa would be disturbed by the development of mining access roads below the mesa top.</p>

^a The BLM San Juan RMP was approved following publication of the BLM Utah Statewide Wilderness EIS. The analysis of impacts summarized here has been modified to reflect the more restrictive management practices established by the RMP.